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ABSTRACT

This document reports on the first of three outreach meetings convened by the Migrant Education Secondary Assistance Project. The meeting addressed characteristics that affect the academic achievement of migrant secondary school-aged youth. Held in conjunction with the New York Migrant Education Program State Conference, the meeting provided participants from both sending and receiving states an opportunity to examine the characteristics of migrant secondary students that help or hinder their academic achievement. In the course of the three-day meeting, participants were able to describe the characteristics that may contribute to migrant students' success or failure in school. These characteristics include those of migrant families, of migrant youth themselves, and of the school system. In addition, participants were able to identify strategies for promoting success and to hear migrant dropouts discuss their own school experiences. Participants reached the conclusion that many of the "problems" migrant youth experience stem from detrimental behaviors, policies, or traditions in the schools. Participants recommended more emphasis on dropout services and secondary school services for migrant youth, more national consistency in migrant youth services, and increased coordination among state and national programs. (TES)

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CHARACTERISTICS
OF
MIGRANT SECONDARY STUDENTS
OUTREACH REPORT

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RC 017522

CHARACTERISTICS OF MIGRANT SECONDARY STUDENTS

FIRST OUTREACH MEETING REPORT

Prepared and Written by
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Authorized by
the Migrant Education Secondary Assistance (MESA) Project
under a contract from the United States Department of Education,
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And special consultants: Kenneth Frye, Thomas Ryan and Lila Shapiro

And, of course, this project would not have been possible without the cooperation of the state directors of Migrant Education. Many thanks!

The information reported herein was prepared pursuant to a contract with the United States Department of Education. However, the opinions, conclusions, and recommendations expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the Department of Education, and no official endorsement by the Department of Education should be inferred.

PREFACE

The Migrant Education Secondary Assistance (MESA) project convened three special "outreach meetings" to give migrant educators an opportunity to explore problems and issues, discuss emerging trends, and share promising secondary education practices. Each of the meetings focused on a particular topic germane to migrant secondary education. The topics included:

Characteristics of Secondary Migrant Students
October 24-26, 1988
Silver Bay, New York

Exploring Mobility Issues
November 14-15, 1988
McAllen, Texas

Current Practices: Future Directions
May 3, 1989
Portland, Oregon

The meetings were held in conjunction with other Migrant Education activities. The first outreach meeting was held in conjunction with the New York State Migrant Education Conference. Special thanks for the logistics go to Ms. Molly Nye and Ms. Pat Ward, conference coordinators. The MESA project was graciously welcomed as part of the conference and included as a special strand. The second meeting was held in conjunction with an interstate counselors' workshop. Representatives from approximately twenty states were able to provide MESA with valuable information regarding mobility issues. MESA's inclusion in the conference was made possible by the support of Mr. Jesse Vela, Director of the Texas Migrant Interstate Program. The third meeting was held at the National Migrant Education Conference in Portland, Oregon. MESA staff thank Ms. Sharon Huck and Mr. Merced Flores, conference coordinators, for including the outreach meeting on the National Conference agenda. The national base of the conference gave migrant educators from across the country the opportunity to participate in the MESA project.

The meetings would not have been possible without Ms. Susan Morse, consultant on interstate programs, for serving as facilitator for the three meetings. She is very skilled at involving participants in the discussions, keeping participants on task and in analyzing information.

The executive summary and outreach meeting report on "Characteristics of Secondary Migrant Students" are included in this report.

Robert Lynch, Director
BOCES Geneseo Migrant Center

Executive Summary

Characteristics of Migrant Secondary Students

The first Outreach Meeting of the Migrant Education Secondary Assistance (MESA) Project was conducted in Silver Bay, New York, on October 24-26, 1988. The meeting addressed the characteristics of migrant secondary school aged youth that contribute positively or negatively to their success in school.

Hosted in conjunction with the New York Migrant Education Program State Conference, the meeting provided participants from both sending and receiving states an opportunity to examine the characteristics of migrant secondary students that help or hinder their progress through the school system. In the course of the three-day meeting, participants were able to describe the characteristics of migrant families, of migrant youth themselves and of the school system which may contribute to the success or failure of these youth. In addition they were able to identify strategies for promoting success. Participants also had the opportunity to hear directly from migrant dropouts about their successes and failures during a youth panel.

Significant results of the meeting were:

1) The development of a definition of 'success,'

2) Consensus that migrant youth bring many strengths with them to the schools and that these strengths can be used to build successful school experiences (these strengths were identified),

3) Observations that many of the "problems" migrant youth experience stem from behaviors, policies or traditions in the schools which are detrimental to the success of migrant youth (these were also listed by the participants),

4) Recommendations for: a stronger emphasis on secondary school and dropout services for migrant youth; more consistency nationally in offering certain minimum services to migrant youth; and leadership from interstate projects, including the Program Development Centers and interstate secondary projects in the development and dissemination of effective means of serving secondary level youth, and in coordination of services among states.

Characteristics of Migrant Secondary Students

First Outreach Meeting
Report

Migrant Education Secondary Assistance (MESA) Project

October 24-26, 1988
Silver Bay, New York

The topic of this Outreach Meeting was *The Characteristics of Migrant Secondary Students*. The purpose was to gather together a group of informed migrant educators, and cooperatively explore both the positive and negative characteristics of secondary students that determine their success in school.

The meeting was conducted in four sessions, preceded by the Youth Panel. The first session provided an overview presentation and was followed by two working sessions covering student characteristics at home, and at school. In the summary session, recommendations for further action were made by the group.

Youth Panel

On October 24th, 1988, a youth panel of seven migrant students and dropouts spoke to the New York State Migrant Education Conference at Silver Bay, New York, as an aspect of the MESA Outreach Meeting. These young people represented interstate, intrastate, binational, current and former migrants.

New York State Senator Jack Perry, also Director of the Interstate Migrant

Education Council, moderated the panel discussion. The youth were recommended by the New York Migrant Tutorial Outreach Programs. The panel included: Sandra Mendez Doty of Brockport, New York; Montrose Cole of Haines City, Florida; Dixie Robinholt of West Bloomfield, New York; Maria Rivera of Holcomb, New York and Puerto Rico; Linda Thusky of Holcomb, New York and Rapid Lake, Canada; and Eric Worsell of Cortland, New York. Connie Castaneda of Brockport, a former migrant, joined the panel from the audience.

The panel mentioned some of the barriers they encountered as well as the positive factors that contributed to their success. Even though not every panelist had completed high school, they viewed their lives as successful and had career goals. Wanda, mother of three, dropped out of school because of her children. She advised others to wait to marry and plans to become a nurse or teacher when her children are older. Linda, a binational migrant, mentioned the problems of the language barriers and having the secondary school one hundred miles from the Algonquin Reserve in her native Quebec, Canada. One of the students cited the problem of alcoholism in the family and the fact that some parents do not want their children in Migrant Education programs.

On the positive side, students mentioned parental emphasis of education; the pride they developed from the Migrant Tutorials; and the determination necessary to complete high school despite pregnancy.

Panelists were asked what their easiest or favorite school subjects were and what were the most difficult ones. Responses varied widely depending on interests. Maria and Wanda found math to be easiest, but English was their most difficult subject. Maria credits good math teachers with her success. Montrose said Spanish, home economics and ROTC were her easiest courses while English and history were her most difficult ones. Eric took three English classes in one year to make up credit and found this to be very challenging. Sandra, who is a college graduate, had been enrolled in the College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) during her freshman year. She encouraged other students to think beyond high school and aim for white collar jobs. Several of the students had taken P.A.S.S. courses to help them get required courses for graduation.

The youth discussed the ways teachers made school easier and recognized students' cultures. Sandra mentioned that teachers need to talk to students in Spanish when appropriate. She also felt that students should not be labeled "migrant" or placed in ESL classes when they are

already fluent. Some panelists felt that some of the teachers ignored them or discriminated against them while other teachers were supportive. Connie felt that it is necessary for teachers to make students proud of their heritage and to make them feel as if they are part of the class.

When the panelists were asked what still needs to be done in Migrant Education, Sandra responded that there needs to be communication between schools to ensure credit transfer. Connie emphasized that there needs to be a focus on parents and the family as a whole. Migrant Education programs should also pay attention to the culture and ways to lessen culture shock. Since workers migrate for financial reasons, education is not as important as providing the daily necessities of life. Connie noted how hard it is to break the cycle of poverty. She stressed the need for good programs, good teachers, and parent involvement.

There was discussion on how to get parents involved. A migrant parent from the audience stressed that it is necessary to let parents know they are important. Maria said her family was very close and supportive. Connie said that language barriers keep some parents from being aware of conferences. She also mentioned the long work hours and lack of "nice" clothes to wear to school that also deter parents from involvement. There needs to be a good rapport established between parents and teachers

Youth were asked if migrant staff had come to their homes. Eric said he felt embarrassed by his house and economic circumstances when they visited. Connie felt scared when she saw someone who was very different and unfamiliar. She said that tutors who visited tried not to show disdain.

One recurring theme that ran through the discussion was the importance of family. This is worth remembering in future planning.

Session I

An introduction and overview of the MESA project included an introduction of the staff members, and the advisory committee; a review of the tasks outlined in the contract; and a status report of the activities and products to date. Participants were also informed about the services of the project and the ways in which they could participate.

One of the questions asked by the groups was "What is the definition of success?" So, the group described success. We found our answers fell into three categories:

The Definition of SUCCESS

The group decided that success might come in terms of 1) public acknowledgements; 2) useful skills; and 3) affective attributes.

1) measurements of success
    - graduation/ high school diploma
    - successful passages through the school systems
    - success in postsecondary education
    - G.E.D. / High school equivalency diploma/ adult ed. diploma

2) life skills
    - development of marketable skills
    - ability to participate in and contribute to society
    - ability to exercise control over the direction of their lives,
    - access to and knowledge of choices
    - goal oriented attitudes and skills
        (having skills to work toward goals)
    - ability to make a living
    - self-sufficiency

3) success in the affective realm
    - high self-esteem
    - having goals
    - enabling skills
    - empowerment
    - self-advocacy
    - having hope and a positive world view
    - being multi-cultural (pride in one's heritage plus competence in the dominant culture)
    - feeling successful/content

Session II

The first working session covered the topic, Home and Family: Characteristics of Migrant Secondary Students. In introduction, Susan Morse, the facilitator, discussed the advantages to viewing migrant students in terms of their positive characteristics as well as in terms of their needs. This was referred to as an asset model.

The group listed descriptors presently used for migrants which might carry negative implications and they attempted to think of more positive descriptors that could be used.

migrant	*mobile, workers*
limited English proficient	*potentially bilingual, dual language speaker*
disadvantaged	*culturally enriched/ different*
transient	*well traveled, geographically enriched, flexible, adaptable, resilient, resourceful*

Some advantages to using the **asset** model in supplementary education programs are:

1) Focusing on strengths **builds student self-esteem**.
2) A teaching approach that focuses on strengths **builds on students' success,** and **improves motivation.**
3) Emphasizing the strengths of migrant students can help to **raise student expectations** for them.
4) If the problem is not always attributed to the student it can **change the focus of needs for change from the student to the institution.**

A discussion of home and family characteristics of migrant youth and helped the participants to realize that we all have valuable cultural and family traditions which provide us with strengths and models, and that it is important to value and preserve these customs.

Positive characteristics that migrant youth bring from their homes and families:

The group developed a list of these characteristics indicating to which of the many migrant mobility groups, cultures or ethnic groups these characteristics might apply.
The characteristics were:

-extended family support (i.e., Mexican, Haitian families)
-family unit support (i.e., Black and Anglo and Native American families)
-work ethic
-cooperation in groups (i.e., Hispanic, Asian)
-religious and ethnic identity

-respect for authority
-strong life skills and survival skills
-valuing education (especially new immigrants)

The group observed that cultural characteristics may change with exposure to this country or to urban areas. In some cases students may become more "at risk" the longer they are in this country.

Individual characteristics demonstrated by migrant youth:

Students may bring individual strengths or *weaknesses* to the school:

+maturity (students are often treated as adults in their families)
+responsibility (students have had responsibility for siblings)
-fatalism, passivity (they do not operate independently from their families, who also have little control of their destinies)
+optimism (if they are recent immigrants they believe in the American dream, and hope to improve their future)
+self-advocacy (some individuals have learned this skill)
-lack of self-advocacy (may be intimidated by dominant culture and language and afraid to speak up)
+resiliency (mobility may help to develop these characteristics)
+resourcefulness
+cooperative skills (this is a characteristic of many migrant groups, ie Hispanic and black cultures)
-lack of cooperative skills (this is a characteristic of some other migrant groups, i.e ., New England dairy migrants)
+endurance

+humor (Migrant educators are sometimes amazed and impressed by the humor and endurance exhibited by migrant youth and their families)

The group felt that there was a need for caution in making generalizations of any kind.

Session III

The topic of the third session (second work session) of the meeting was: School: Characteristics of Migrant Secondary Students.

The group quickly discovered that it would need to address the **positive and negative characteristics of the secondary school** in order to accurately represent the situation for migrant students. The question presented to the group was: *What are the positive factors in the school environment that help migrant secondary students succeed? Negative factors?*

In order to provide a comparison to their own personal experience, the group shared what they liked most about high school. The answers included: sports, art, friends, theatre, courses, yearbook, boys, flexibility, being treated more like an adult, music, being the class clown. Some did not like high school at all.

Characteristics of the Schools (listed by the group)

These are areas which were considered to have a negative impact on the students and to be areas which schools need to address or examine as possibly being detrimental to migrant and high risk students.

The educators participating in the workshops were aware of the results of the National At Risk Youth Conference sponsored by the Education Commission of the States in Fall 1988, which recommended system change and more alternatives for students at the high school level. In addition these educators had witnessed the frustrations and rejections experienced by migrant youth which are sometimes unwittingly, sometimes unconsciously perpetuated by the high school system. Often, the group felt, the *victims* (the students) were perceived to be *guilty* or inadequate, when their lifestyles and the present school structure were just irreconcilably incompatible.

Staff and institutional insensitivity

-Racism
-Lack of sensitivity of staff to migrant students
-Inability to see the whole child
-Labeling/patronizing
-Low expectations
-Tracking
-Need for collegiality, teaming and staff development for staff

Lack of responsiveness, inflexibility of school

-Schools do not meet special needs despite legal mandates to do so.
-Inflexibility of calendar, daily schedules, (evening, year round, Saturdays)
-Counselors unwilling to advocate, assist students, or make adjustments for migrant lifestyle
-Shortage of alternative programs
-Lack of transportation services that results in limiting participation of migrant youth in school, extracurricular programs, and special events
-Poor school wide student attitudes and tone
-Negative peer pressure

Mobility issues

-Exclusion from school because of no records from previous school
-Exclusion from school because of late entry
-No acceptance of partial credit

Curriculum

-Skill based curriculum (rather than concept based)
-Inappropriate curriculum
-Culturally biased competency tests
-Poor placement, services, and evaluation of LEP students
-Poor tracking of and services to students with special needs
-Fragmentation of curriculum/programs/ subjects/ supplementary and categorical programs
-Supplanting
-Excessive prerequisites and required courses

-Unavailability of classes/ exclusion from courses/ low priority for migrant students
-Fragmentation of schedule and school day
-Student costs to attend school

Session IV -- Summary Session

This session provided the group with a chance to summarize the preceding sessions and to develop recommendations for future action. Those recommendations were developed in the areas of staff development, institutional improvements, Migrant Education program services, and for the development of a national plan for secondary services.

Final Recommendations

Staff Training

The importance of staff training cannot be underemphasized. One administrator noted that there is a pitiful disparity between the funds spent on staff salaries, and the funds invested in staff in the form of staff development. The participants made the following recommendations:

-Develop and provide training for staff

-Staff training should be presented on:
  -sensitivity/rural education/migrant lifestyles and
  -culture/language/skill development/cooperative learning/ expectation

-Training should be offered:
  1. at teacher education institutions
  2. at institutes
  3. at inservice training in schools and social service agencies
  4. for interns working in camps, schools, etc
  5. as mentoring, coaching, teaming to maintain and improve skills

-Provide affective education training to staff:

There is a need for role models, motivators, advocates, to defend, support, and encourage students and to help them develop goals, increase participation in extracurricular/ clubs.

In order for staff to serve as advocates to migrant students, long term on-going staff development for these advocates may be needed.

Institutional Improvements

These positive suggestions were made as a result of an examination of the somewhat critical list generated by the participants on the topic: characteristics of the schools. It is felt that schools would experience more success with migrant students were they able to achieve some of the following:

-Programs should communicate to achieve congruence
-Better assessing of individual needs and building of programs
-Expansion of extracurricular activities, inclusion of migrant students in activities
-More alternative programs (more beyond school day programs)
-Alternative graduation plans, i.e., Giving Rural Adults a Study Program (G.R.A.S.P.)- a 1 year pilot project available through the East Bloomfield Migrant Tutorial, E. Bloomfield, N.Y.
-Provide day care
-Economic assistance
  in-school scholarships
  jobs
-Work-experience
-P.A.S.S. (Portable Assisted Study Sequence) program is now available in more than 20 states
-Fair and consistent discipline

Migrant Education Program Services

In order for Migrant Education to remain both categorical and supplementary, and to most effectively assist migrant students to graduate, creative strategies are needed to serve high school students and dropout youth. The following recommendations were made:

-More residential and commuter HEPs

-Summer Institutes providing credit, self-esteem, motivation
-Migrant Education supplementary activities and services (interstate, Real Talk)
-MSRTS alternative ed tracking, i.e., G.E.D. progress, alternative programs, contact person

Services for students

These services may be provided by social service or community agencies, by Migrant Education or by the schools, but they are intended to provide direct services in response to student needs.

-Provide economic incentives to stay in school i.e., JTPA/EBCE/ Workstudy/STEP/Upward Bound
-Develop dropout retrieval plans and programs-- (clarification of funding and services needed)
-Provide training for independence, student self-advocacy
-Help families maintain cultural strengths-- help them value and enhance their cultural values

National Plan for Secondary

The participants discussed the need for some consistency, direction, and guidelines in serving secondary aged youth nationally. It was felt that there were some services that should be available universally from the Migrant Education program in every state. These we labeled minimum services to secondary youth.

MINIMUM SERVICES

+a graduation plan for every student, or
+a G.E.D./vocational or an alternative plan
+interdistrict (state) credit acceptance
+access to a credit makeup system (i.e., P.A.S.S.)
+competency test assistance
+training in life/survival skills
+affective services/suppport, role models, and access to someone who speaks the language

Other Recommendations at the National Level

-Increase intra/interstate ID&R of secondary students and dropouts
-Establish partnerships to increase funding and resources
-Provide stable funding for HEP and CAMP (institutionalization of HEP)
-Train PDCs in priority areas and in a National plan for secondary services
-Provide year round services for migrant secondary students,
-Provide services at times (seasons) that meet student needs rather than program preferences.
-Provide alternative graduation plans, a G.E.D. for mobile students, G.R.A.S.P. (Giving Rural Adults a Study Program)
-Establish summer institutes for students to earn extra credit, and develop self-esteem and motivation.
-Establish residential and commuter HEPs (High School Equivalency Programs)
-Facilitiate MSRTS tracking of alternative education programs, G.E.D. progress, and contact person (at least) for dropouts.
-Use MSRTS; show MSRTS to classroom teachers and counselors.